THE STRANGER WITHIN OUR GATES

By Agnes Repplier

"Fifty thousand young women and girls are lost in the United States every year. They simply drop out of existence."—THEODORE BINGHAM, former Commissioner of Police, New York City.

During one of the last three great expositions held in America there were over 5,000 disappearances which the police could not trace. There were nearly as many at one of the others. At the Panama-Pacific Exposition, in San Francisco, the Travelers' Aid Society for the first time had quarters on the Exposition grounds and the number of disappearances was only 58.

In the year 1915, personal assistance, free of charge, was given by the Travelers' Aid Society to more than 750,000 persons in varying degrees of distress, in the United States and Canada. A startling proportion of these consisted of young girls standing on the brink of a precipice and unconscious of their danger.

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WHEN William Powell Frith painted his once famous picture of the "Railway Station," and delighted the hearts of the British public, which loves, and has always loved, anecdotal art, he heightened the dramatic values of his composition by crowding a number of probable happenings into one impossible moment. A young bride fares forth on her wedding journey, a sorrowful mother bids farewell to her little son, a criminal is arrested as he sets foot on the departing train. The huge and animated canvas is now valuable chiefly for the correctness of its costumes, the sedate and ample draperies of 1862; but, when we come to think of it, there is no such theatre for human emotions as a railway station in a great city. If we waited long enough, we might see the drama of life played out upon its stage. It is because we are always hurried or preoccupied that we pay no heed to the tragedies, the comedies, the pathetic little interludes, which are being enacted before our careless eyes.

A year ago I saw, as I passed sleepily through a gate of the Pennsylvania Station in Philadelphia (I was returning from New York, and it was half-past

ten o'clock at night), two little girls who stood eagerly scanning the long line of passengers. They were so small, and they looked so tired, that I paused to see if anyone they knew had come on my train. There was no one, and they drew back, whispering to each other in Yiddish, and plainly prepared to resume their watch. I spoke to them, and found they had been there since early morning. Their father had sent them to meet their mother, who, with the baby, was coming "some time" from New York. I asked why the father had not come himself. They said he did not speak any English, he was "no good." Their mother did not speak English either. She would not know what to do unless they met her. I asked where they lived. Miles away, in the south-eastern section of the city. I asked if they knew what cars would take them home. They had no money for car-fares, but their mother would have money. It would be "all right" when she and the baby came.

I bought some sandwiches for the poor little creatures—their bodies drooped pitifully, but their spirits were unquelled—and inquired of a porter when the next train was due. "In twenty minutes." I waited those twenty minutes. The next train brought no mother, no baby, and no change in the children's resolution. I then consulted with the agent of the Travelers' Aid Society, put the little girls in her care, and gave her money for their car-fare—distrusting the mother's solvency. She said the situation was not unusual. Immigrants often waited twenty-four

hours for the arrival of friends and relatives. But she promised that these children should not be allowed to stay after midnight, that they should be sent safely home, and that the mother and baby, if they came, should be detained and housed in the station until morning.

It was a very simple incident, but fraught with the infinite trustfulness of childhood, the infinite patience of the poor. There is no country in the world where travelers need help so sorely as they do in the United States, because our distances are so vast, and night journeys are so often imperative. Also because many of the poor wayfarers speak but a few words of English, and are hopelessly confused and daunted by the strangeness of their surroundings. The hard-worked railway officials are, as a rule, courteous but their time is limited. It is trying to have a large family of Lithuanians blocking the gate, presenting the wrong tickets, holding back other passengers, and, above all, failing to understand the vigorous and highly idiomatic language addressed to them. A ticket-puncher is not supposed to be a philologist, and he isn't. But when I recall the invariable good temper with which Italian officials help on their way the distraught tourists who wander speechless over Italy, I recognize the depth and breadth of a civilization which has achieved universal urbanity.

For there is no older and no nobler sentiment in the world than solicitude for the traveler. It goes back, back, to the days when Abraham sat before his tent and entertained angels unaware. It is, and has

always been, the flowering of humanity in the East. It proved its worth in the Middle Ages, when hospitality blossomed fairly along the pilgrim's path, and doors were set wide open at his coming. And the survival of this civilizing influence, of this most beautiful tradition, may be found to-day in the determination of conscientious citizens that no wanderer shall unwittingly come to grief in this wide western land, that no hurt shall overtake the man, no shame the woman, who enters our cities and our towns.

To make this determination far-reaching and practical is now the unceasing effort of the Travelers' Aid Society. When it says, and says truthfully, on its notices: "No girl or other traveler need be friendless on arriving in New York;" "No girl or other traveler need be friendless on arriving in Boston;" "No girl or other traveler need be friendless on arriving in San Francisco," it gives to the world an assurance of good faith, and it transfers personal responsibility (which otherwise no one of us dares shirk) from the shoulders of its subscribers to the very capable shoulders of the Society and its agents. If we will give the money (which is an easy matter) they will do the work,—which is sometimes very hard. They will keep patient watch and ward over the entrances to our cities. They will see to it that the poor are protected from imposition, the helpless from disaster.

It is essential that the labors of the Travelers' Aid Society should be principally directed to the saving of women and girls from the traps which are too

often laid for them, from vicious schemes to which their ignorance or their folly makes them an easy prey. Parents are asked to commit their daughters to the care of agents wearing the official badge. Girls are warned against the danger of asking advice or assistance from strangers. In every town where the Society is represented (and it should be represented in every town of the Union), there is some one to whom the traveler may confidently turn for help, and who may be recognized by the badge she wears.

It is no new danger which confronts the girl who comes to seek work in a strange city. The first print of Hogarth's "Harlot's Progress" tells us the pitiful story, which is being forever repeated. A comely country lass descends with her bundles from the stage, into the London streets, and there is the procuress ready to meet and greet her. When this pleasant, handsomely dressed woman chucks the girl under the chin, and smiles broadly at her, we know that the poor simpleton's fate is sealed; and the remaining prints reveal to us only the inevitable consequences of this sad encounter. There is no cruelty in the world like the calculating cruelty of the women and men who prey upon the ignorance of youth. It is the plague spot of civilization, from which the Travelers' Aid is doing its part to deliver us. We owe the moral and financial support which will ensure success to its labors.

There are other wayfarers, however, whose needs, if less imperative than those of the endangered girl, still cry sharply for help. There are sick children

whose frightened mothers do not know what to do for them. There are lost children who have strayed in some mysterious fashion from family groups too ample to miss them. There are children who expect to be met, and who are not met. There are bewildered women looking in vain for a familiar face. There are stolid speechless aliens who, having descended from their train, are smitten with a palsy of indecision, and, sitting on their complicated luggage, seem to be apathetically awaiting the end of the world. There are excited and voluble aliens who want to go west on an east-bound train, or to travel five hundred miles on the first local that leaves the station. And there are Americans speaking intelligible English, but every whit as befuddled as the foreigner.

One such country-woman I saw in a New England station, and, if ever the agent of the Travelers' Aid Society appeared as a beneficent spirit, it must have been to that poor worn-out creature. She was not young, and she was of an amazing bulk. Her girth alone would have carried her unscathed through one set of perils; but in some droll, heartrending fashion, it added to her utter forlornness. She had come a long way, and she had a long way still to go. She had missed more connections than would have seemed possible in a single trip, and she had to make, or miss, other connections before reaching her destination. The dusk of a winter evening had drawn on, and she seemed prostrated by weariness, and trouble, and fatigue. To her, the agent admin-

istered first a cup of tea, next a few words of comfort, and finally some directions too plain to be mistaken. It was as needful a kindness as I ever saw done, and it is doubtless being repeated over and over again, wherever the Society receives encouragement and support.

In this fashion we fulfil the good old rules which impose upon us, as they imposed upon our ancestors, kindness and hospitality to the traveler. The complications of modern life have closed our doors, but they need not shut our hearts. The obligation has not changed with changing conditions. We who are comfortably housed, whose children are cared for, whose daughters know no danger, owe something to the men and women, the young boys and girls, who, all the year round, are seeking new homes, fresh work, another chance in life. We can pay this debt by seeing to it that in New York, the great city of the Union, and in all the lesser cities of the Union, the Travelers' Aid Society is nobly supported, and that every station has its appointed agent or agents. This done, our responsibility ends. If harm comes to man or woman, boy or girl, our shoulders bear no burden of blame.

AGNES REPPLIER.

A GROUP OF WORKERS AT THE PANAMA-PACIFIC EXPOSITION

Their time was given to the protection of travelers, young and old, against all forms of imposition and to the defeat of the nefarious designs of white slavers and other panderers to vice and crime. For the first time at any great exposition the Travelers' Aid Society had headquarters on the grounds. Whereas at previous expositions there were from four to five thousand disappearances which the police could never trace, at the Panama-Pacific Exposition there were but fifty-eight.

TRAVELERS' AID SOCIETY
OF NEW YORK

What It Is:

The Travelers' Aid Society is a non-sectarian, non-political, non-commercial protective organization incorporated under the laws of the State of New York to safeguard travelers, particularly women and girls, who, by reason of inexperience, ignorance, illness, infirmity or disability, are in need of protection and assistance.

What It Does:

The Travelers' Aid Society gives advice, information and protection to all travelers irrespective of age, race, class, creed or sex, and when necessary it provides at its own home, at 465 Lexington Avenue, temporary housing for women and children travelers. Its purpose is to prevent crime, extortion and wrong against innocent and unsophisticated travelers. The Society also investigates on request from all parts of the world the good faith of the situations offered to women and girls in New York City. All of its services are rendered absolutely free and its agents are prohibited from accepting any gratuities.

How It Does It:

The women agents of this Society, who speak all the ordinary foreign languages and dialects, meet all through trains day and night at the principal stations in the metropolitan district, as well as all steamers, for the purpose of aiding, protecting or conducting inexperienced or confused travelers to their destinations either within the city or to the other trains and steamers, or, when necessary, to the home of the Society. This protection is followed up by notification to cooperating societies at the points of destination of the travelers so that they are met and taken care of at the end of their journey.

Why It Does It:

Social conditions in a large city like New York and the activity and avarice of those who flourish by crime are such that advantage is taken of many travelers by these agents of commercialized vice. Agents of disorderly houses, dishonest and unscrupulous men and women, travel on trains and boats and loiter along the highways with the deliberate purpose of defrauding or exploiting the inexperienced. Every year thousands of young women come to the great cities, a large proportion of them looking for a chance of honorable livelihood. Without the protection of this Society many of these would fall easy prey to those unscrupulous men and women.

This work was initiated in 1885 and its growth and development is shown by the large increase in the expenditures of the Society until now the annual requirement for New York City alone is over $40,000. The work has extended from New York to 136 other cities throughout the United States.

How Supported:

The Travelers' Aid Society in New York City has been supported entirely by voluntary contributions and subscriptions from philanthropic persons and organizations, but unfortunately it has recently sustained the loss of its largest contributor. To maintain the work at its present point of efficiency its income will have to be augmented to a very large extent, and this appeal is made for generous annual contributions from those who recognize the necessity for this broad preventive agency.

Contributions may be sent to the office of the Society, 465 Lexington Avenue, New York City.

TRAVELERS' AID SOCIETY

465 Lexington Ave., New York City

Cable Address, "Newtas" Telephone, 323-324 Murray Hill

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IF YOU WERE TO LOOK INSIDE THESE FILING CABINETS

you would find over 130,000 secret records of runaway girls snatched back from the edge of a precipice; of runaway boys rescued from dangers of which they had no conception; of elderly men and women protected from the impositions of crooks and swindlers; of travelers in all sorts of difficulties helped without charge and sent on their way rejoicing. These are part of the records in the New York office alone.

This is the Badge

worn by the Travelers' Aid Society workers, who meet trains and steamers at all hours of the day and night, ready to help those in danger or trouble and to do it without charge.